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SUBJECT: GHANA CELEBRATES 50 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE

¶1. Summary: On March 6, Ghanaians celebrated 50 years of independence with a colorful parade and other events attended by delegations from all over the world. The GOG appreciated the presence of the U.S. Presidential delegation, headed by Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Alphonso Jackson,

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which was joined by an 11-person delegation from the Congressional Black Caucus and by Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr., representing the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition. Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo was Jubilee guest of honor and received Ghana's highest national honor. Late planning and weak coordination produced moments of confusion and significant protocol lapses. Nonetheless, Ghanaians were mostly festive, celebratory, and openly patriotic. Many streets and buildings in Accra and the surrounding region received a facelift for the occasion in the form of fresh paint, decorative Ghanaian flags, Ghana's national colors, and images of Ghana's heroes. Two official holidays, free concerts, and laser and fireworks displays were the grace notes for the major commemorative Jubilee symphony that played out in Accra March 5-6. End summary.

¶2. The centerpiece of the celebration was a military parade and parade of school children attended by thousands at Independence Square on March 6. Heads of state from Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Namibia, Togo, Benin, both Congos, Gabon, Burkina Faso, Mauritius, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mali, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Botswana, Lesotho, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria and South Africa attended, along with other delegations and VIPs. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Alphonso Jackson (accompanied by Mrs. Jackson) headed the U.S. Presidential delegation, which included Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer, U.S. Ambassador Pamela E. Bridgewater, CEO of the Millennium Challenge Corporation John Danilovich, and Director of the Peace Corps Ronald Tschetter. Also attending were an 11-member Congressional delegation headed by Congressional Black Caucus Chairperson Carolyn Kilpatrick and a private delegation from the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition led by Reverend Jesse Jackson. Other VIP visitors included one of Kwame Nkrumah's daughters, Stevie Wonder and numerous private groups and individuals who wanted to help Ghana and Africa celebrate this important milestone.

¶3. In his Independence Day speech, President Kufuor paid tribute to Ghana's major historical figures and advised against complacency in the future, praising Africa's progress and urging the youth to contribute positively to the continent. The guest of honor, Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo, received Ghana's highest award, the Companion of the Order of the Star of Ghana, at a State Banquet. Ghanaian Foreign Minister Nana Akufo-Addo read the citation praising Obasanjo's contribution to Ghana and Africa. There is now a street named for Obasanjo in recognition of his friendship with and support to Ghana, particularly since the ruling NPP

came to power in 2001. In his remarks at the parade and at the State banquet, Obasanjo lauded Ghana as representing the "vanguard of African unity," and challenged Ghana to use its leadership role within the African Union to inspire a regeneration of that unity.

¶4. Comment: While most Ghanaians turned out in their numbers, former President Rawlings did not, ostensibly because he was angry about the manner that the Kufuor administration had treated him and his wife. NDC Presidential hopeful John Atta Mills and others from the party attended Jubilee events. Some Ghanaians raised questions about the \$20 million cost of the 2 day celebration, which included the purchase of a fleet of 24 luxury cars for use by VIPs and VVIPs. There has been a national debate about Kufuor's decision to wear a Western suit instead of the traditional kente cloth robe at the parade (he responded that he wanted to project a modern image; he later donned regal kente attire at Ghana,s State Banquet and at a State Banquet in London hosted by H.M. Queen Elizabeth 2 on March 13.)

¶5. Comment Continued: The parade was executed with precision, color and pageantry, covered by a huge turnout of international media. The parade fly pass, by Ghana,s air force, which included one of Ghana,s newly purchased Chinese K-8 fighter planes was thrilling and impressive, as the colors of the flag were sprayed across a clear sky. At other events, the GOG was overwhelmed by the task of coordinating and accommodating large numbers of dignitaries along with Ghanaians who felt entitled to be present, even if they were not invited. The formal state banquet, for example, at the newly renovated State House, was marred by lapses in protocol and security, including confusion over invitations (none of which bore names of guests) and a chaotic rush to the doors at the stat of the event. Most Ghanaians today realize thatthey must seize the opportunity now to turn the prsent

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challenges into opportunities to maximize the goodwill Ghana has garnered from around the world. There was genuine jubilation at this jubilee and much for Ghanaians and other Africans to be proud of despite the few glitches. Ghana at 50, and events in Accra, were indeed the hottest tickets on the continent March 5-6. End comment.

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